

# Montana Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy

## What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

## Montana snapshot

With over 90 million acres of land, 40,000 lakes or ponds, 98,000 miles of named streams and rivers, Montana has been tagged “The Last Best Place.” Over 600 vertebrate species are known to exist across Montana’s diverse landscapes, ranging from forest-covered mountains in the west, to grasslands and sagebrush in the east. Montana’s hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities are the basis of many outdoor traditions, and the reasons why people call Montana home or return time and time again to visit the state’s natural places.

they live. The strategy sets out to identify critical habitats for both species in need of conservation and species that are doing well. The strategy consists of four



Grizzly Bear Family /MT FWP

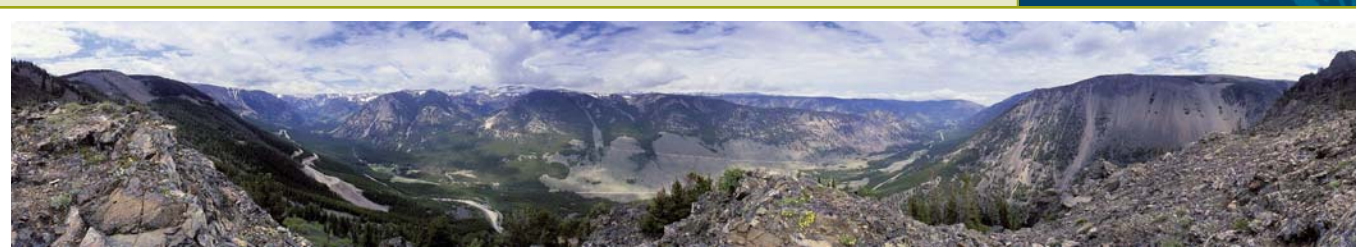
## Montana’s planning approach

Montana’s Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy is an extensive analysis of more than 600 species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and mussels along with the places

components: geographic focus areas, fish and wildlife community types, species of greatest conservation need, and species in need of inventory. Focus areas have been identified as geographic starting points for Fish, Wildlife and Parks and partners to direct combined efforts to conserve

*“A collaborative approach to conservation will ensure future generations of Montanans a diverse landscape rich in fish and wildlife, as well as the preservation of our outdoor traditions.”*

*–Montana Governor  
Brian Schweitzer*



Panoramic/Carl Heilman

Montana's community types and species in greatest conservation need.

## Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Montana



Pygmy Rabbit - Tier 1 species/MT Natural Heritage Program, C. Currier

Montana's action plan identifies conservation concerns for all components of the strategy: 30 focus areas, seven community types, and 60 species in greatest conservation need.

Each conservation concern identified has at least one or multiple conservation strategies accompanying it that could be implemented on the ground. The hope is to put the strategies into action in cooperation with conservation organizations, landowners, and others, to address the conservation concerns

proactively before they become an issue requiring regulatory action.

## Working together for Montana's wildlife

An advisory group consisting of state and federal agencies, tribes, industries, conservation organizations and other interest groups met in 2003 to discuss the development of Montana's action plan. These groups, along with all Fish, Wildlife and Parks staff and the general public were involved in review of the draft action plan before it was submitted for federal approval. Seven meetings were held around the state during the summer of 2005 to review the draft strategy and provide comments. About 45 people attended, representing more than 25 different organizations, along with private landowners and interested citizens. Web pages were developed with online comment forms to facilitate action plan review as well. Comments were received on all sections of the draft action plan.

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of conservation concern*	Species of conservation concern that can be hunted or fished	Threatened/ endangered
Mussels/crayfish	8	1	0	0
Fish	87	17	9	3
Amphibians	18	3	0	0
Reptiles	17	5	0	0
Birds	398	19	2	4
Mammals	108	15	1	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>

\* Each state is using its own criteria for this category. Montana prioritized its species component into four tiers based on level of conservation need. The species of conservation concern as noted above are Tier I species, considered in greatest conservation need. Tier II species are in moderate conservation need, Tier III are in lower conservation need, and Tier IV species are non-native, incidental, or periphery species.

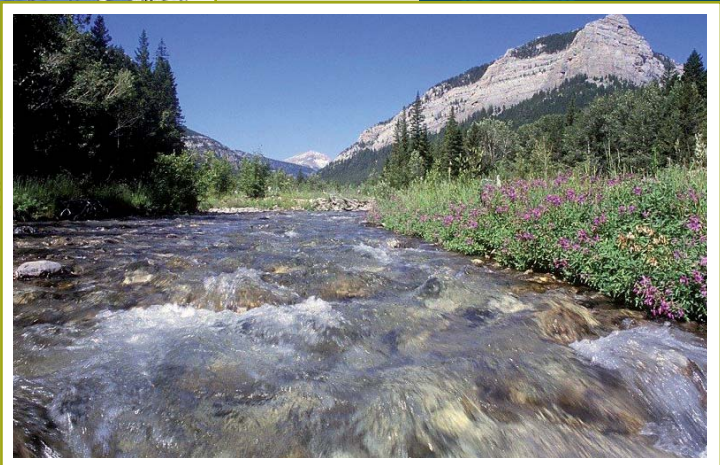
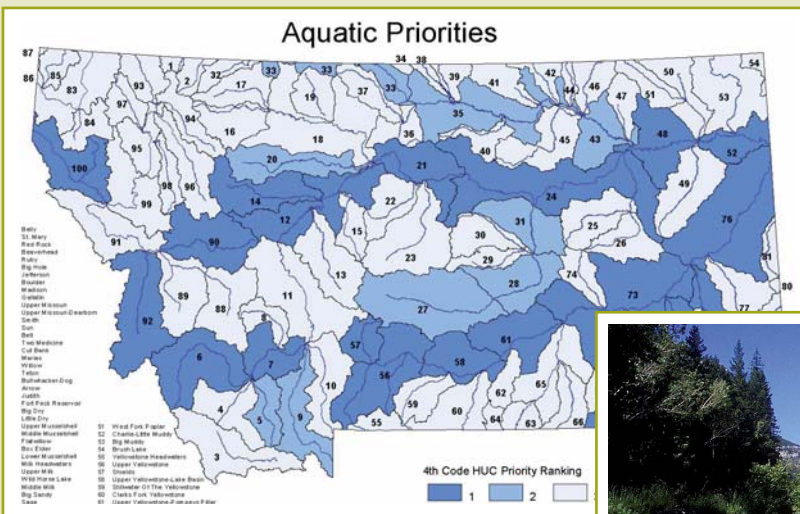
## Wildlife highlights



Panoramic/Carl Heilman

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Grassland Complexes Community Type</b>	Northern Leopard Frog, Smooth Greensnake, Greater Sage Grouse, Black-footed Ferret	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spread of noxious weeds and non-native plants, especially knapweed, leafy spurge and cheatgrass</li> <li>• Loss of natural fire disturbance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent the introduction and spread of noxious weeds on existing tracts of palouse prairie.</li> <li>• Maintain the appropriate native species composition using resource management strategies.</li> <li>• Work with public and private activities to re-establish natural fire regime.</li> </ul>
<b>Riparian and Wetland Community Type</b>	Western Toad, Common Loon, Northern Bog Lemming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draining and conversion of wetlands to agricultural croplands and subdivisions</li> <li>• Loss of riparian habitat due to streamside residential development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with other groups to identify riparian areas and wetlands that are critically important to wildlife diversity and work toward protection and enhancement.</li> <li>• Support strategic conservation easements by conservation organizations and public agencies.</li> </ul>
<b>Mountain Streams</b>	Western Pearlshell Mussel, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Arctic Grayling, Columbia Basin Redband Trout, Bull Trout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Riparian habitats effected by roads, housing development, and range and forest management practices that degrade the adjacent riparian habitat and stream channel</li> <li>• Entrainment of fish in irrigation diversions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices in riparian areas.</li> </ul>

### Recommended actions to conserve Montana's wildlife



Mountain Stream - Community Type/Carl Heilman

*“Montana’s Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy will help identify and prevent problems before they threaten fish, wildlife and natural places. It is preventative health care – investing in the health of species now rather than spending on recovery later. It will help keep important outdoor traditions alive and add to the quality of life for future generations.”*  
 –Jeff Hagener, Director,  
 Montana Fish, Wildlife &  
 Parks

The advisory group reconvened in early January 2006 to help develop selection criteria that will be applied to the action plan to determine conservation priorities for the next five years. Subsequent meetings in each region of the state will involve other partner groups and will focus on developing cooperative projects that comply with identified conservation priorities.

Montana FWP also developed and has begun implementing a communications plan in cooperation with groups like Montana Wildlife Federation, National Wildlife Federation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and others to increase awareness, understanding and involvement in comprehensive conservation.



Arctic grayling restoration at Sun River/MT FWP



Little Elk Creek - Prairie Fish Survey/MT FWP



Arctic grayling - tier 1 species/MT Natural Heritage Program

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